A guide to embedding the learner voice

Background

This resource pack synthesises the outcomes from the Learner Experiences of e-Learning theme of the JISC e-Learning programme, which funded a total of ten projects from 2005 to 2009 and had the sustained involvement of over 200 learners and nearly 3,500 survey respondents to explore learners' perceptions of and participation in technology-enhanced learning in a digital age. The projects adopted a mixed-method approach for eliciting the learner voice, employing a variety of data-collection techniques, but with a focus on rich qualitative data accessed through interviews, diaries and other elicitation techniques, supported in some cases by surveys.

The findings from this research highlight what learners in further and higher education expect from the use of technology, and the choices they make about using technology to support their studies.

What have we learnt?

Project findings confirmed and added detail to many findings from the JISC Google Generation[1] study and Great Expectations of ICT[2] report. Nearly all learners who participated in the Learner Experiences of e-Learning research have access to their own personal technologies such as laptops and mobile phones; though learners without such access are at a disadvantage. Learners expect institutions to support their use of technology, for example by providing robust, reliable and accessible networks and 24/7 access to course materials. For some, such as learners with disabilities, digital materials that they can personalise are essential to their participation in learning. Institutions may need to consider a basic entitlement to ICT access and skills.

However, the concept of e-learning as institutionally provided and curriculum driven is no longer viable. Learners are immersed in a technology-rich environment and make use of the technology available to them in a wide variety of ways to meet the demands of study. Therefore institutions need to consider, beyond the basic entitlement, how they support a wide diversity of technology practices at both individual and curriculum level.

In the Learner Experiences of e-Learning research, some learners with disabilities stand out as agile adopters of technology who are willing to explore the affordances of software and personalise interfaces to suit their needs. Other learners use extensive social networks and/or are proficient in content creation and repurposing. All learners emphasise the quality of the educational experience before the use of any particular technologies.

Beyond their expectations of service provision, and despite using technology extensively in their social and leisure lives, most learners have little idea how they could use technology innovatively in an educational context. In the main, learners rely on their course pedagogies and tutors for guidance. At least on entry to further or higher education, they lack sophistication in their use of information and are relatively uncritical and unreflective. Institutions need to embed across the curriculum a concern for learners' lifelong learning literacies.

[1] www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/resourcediscovery/googlegen

[2] www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/documents/greatexpectations

How to use this resource pack

The contents of *Responding to Learners* include a series of five guides and a set of key messages postcards containing quotes from learners. The postcards summarise the key findings from this JISC-funded research and can form the basis for staff development activities, for example:

- Ask participants to choose three messages they think are surprising or challenging. How would they go about addressing these challenges?

- Use the key messages to lead into a discussion about enhancing learners' experiences of e-learning. Consider:
  - How can learners be supported to develop their own learning skills?
  - What can staff do?
  - What can the institution do?

- Ask participants to group the messages into:
  - Issues where most learners are already making good use of technology
  - Issues where there is a clear digital divide
  - Issues where most learners need a lot of support

  What are appropriate responses in each case?

- In light of these key messages, discuss:
  - How could learners making the transition into higher education be helped to adopt new ways of learning?

- Choose some key messages that are important to your institution, unit or department. Ask participating staff to discuss:

  - Do we have evidence from our own work that supports this message?
  - Do we have any counter evidence?
  - How could we address these issues?

The series of guides offers recommendations on how institutions can better respond to learners' expectations and uses of technology, and offers practical guidance on how to embed the learner's voice more effectively into institutional processes and practice. The five guides are written for different roles within the institution and highlight the key issues relevant to these roles. There are guides for:

- Institutional managers
- Practitioners
- Course teams
- Learning developers and learning support staff
- Researchers

These guides can be used in your institution or organisation, for example to open up discussion or support further research into the learner's perspective on e-learning.

This suite of resources may form the basis for:

- Staff development activities, eg devising strategies for evaluating learners' experiences of technology
- Planning and debating e-learning policy and provision
- Further research into the learner's perspective on e-learning

'A holistic approach to researching learners' experiences with technology, focusing on how learners interact with technology throughout their daily lives and across their learning journeys.'

Participating projects

Phase 1 projects

LEX: The Learner Experiences of e-Learning project

Glasgow Caledonian University and The Open Learning Partnership

www.jisc.ac.uk/elplearneroutcomes

LXP: Student Experiences of Technologies study

The Open University

www.jisc.ac.uk/elplearneroutcomes

Phase 2 projects

Student Reflections on Lifelong e-Learning (STROLL)

University of Hertfordshire and Hertford Regional College

http://tinyurl.com/5vvqom

Students' Blending Learning User Patterns (BLUPs)

University of Northumbria and University of Warwick

www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningpedagogy/blups

Learners' experiences of blended learning environments in a practice-based context (PB-LXP)

The Open University

www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/elearningpedagogy/pblxp

'Learners allowed us into their worlds and showed us what it is like to study in a technology-rich age.'

Exploring the experiences of Master's students in technology-rich environments (Thema)

Oxford University Computing Services

www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/projects/thema

E-learning for Learners (E4L)

University of Northampton, Northampton College and Northamptonshire Adult and Community Learning

http://tinyurl.com/m398fk

Learner Experiences across the Disciplines (LEaD)

University of Edinburgh

www2.epcc.ed.ac.uk/~lead

Disabled Learners' Experiences of e-Learning (LExDis)

University of Southampton

www.lexdis.org

Learner Experiences of e-Learning synthesis project

Oxford Brookes University

https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2

Further information

For further information about the Learner Experiences of e-Learning theme of the JISC e-Learning programme, the projects on which this publication is based, and for electronic copies of this resource pack:

www.jisc.ac.uk/learnerexperience

For a synthesis of findings from the Learner Experiences of e-Learning theme and downloadable resources for practitioners, researchers and managers:

https://mw.brookes.ac.uk/display/JISCle2

For further information about the JISC e-Learning programme:

www.jisc.ac.uk/elearningprogramme

To join the JISC e-Learning programme mailing list, email:

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Responding to Learners

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